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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000684

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN; RPM ESHULTZ
SECDEF FOR PWATSON
USNATO FOR BROGERS

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SUBJECT: MOD BACKTRACKS ON PROPOSED CBE COMPROMISE

REF: YEREVAN 615

Classified By: Charge Vivian Walker for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) informed DAO March 22 that Armenia intends to send 12 participants to the NATO PfP exercise Cooperative Best Effort 04 (CBE 04) in Baku. The decision comes after a previous MOD pledge to send only 3 officers to the exercise in a compromise to the CBE 04 impasse with Azerbaijan. The decision to back out of the compromise seems to have been made by Minister of Defense Serzh Sargsyan. End Summary.

2. (C) The MOD told DAO March 19, and confirmed March 22, that Armenia would send 12 participants to CBE 04 in Baku. The decision backtracks from a previous pledge by Deputy Defense Minister Artur Aghabekian (see reftel) to send only three officers to the exercise. The MOD asserted that under PfP rules Armenia is entitled to determine at which level it will participate in any given event.

3. (C) We stressed to GOAM officials the importance of reaching a compromise with Azerbaijan, and that if the exercise were canceled Armenia would not escape blame. Deputy Defense Minister Mikhail Melkonian told DAO March 19 that he understood U.S. concerns, and that they would be taken into full consideration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Head of the NATO Department, Hrachia Tashchian, told us he was surprised by the MOD decision, and that the MFA had not been consulted. (Note: In a subsequent conversation with Charge, Deputy Foreign Minister Tatoul Margarian confirmed that the MFA "had known nothing about this decision." End Note.)

4. (C) Comment. The decision to renege on the CBE 04 compromise seems to have been made at the highest level of the MOD, despite Deputy Defense Minister Aghabekian's expressed commitment to reach a compromise on exercise participation. Judging from Deputy Foreign Minister Margarian's reaction to the MOD decision, there appears to be very little desire within the GOAM to make any compromises with Azerbaijan in the aftermath of the murder in Budapest. End Comment.

WALKER